

## Georgia Department of Human Resources

# IMMUNIZATION IN GEORGIA

### The Facts

- Georgia law requires all children entering school or daycare to show proof of immunization. However, children should begin to receive vaccinations as infants so they can be protected during the preschool years as well.
- To prevent the occurrence and outbreaks of childhood vaccine preventable diseases, it is necessary to maintain immunization levels of 90 percent or higher. Public health clinics in Georgia monitor immunization levels in both public clinics and in the population as a whole. In 2003, 82% percent of Georgia's two-year-olds were adequately immunized against diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus and varicella (chicken pox), 88% against polio, measles, mumps, rubella, and hepatitis B, and 87% against *haemophilus influenza* type b (Hib disease).
- By two years of age, a child should have received four doses of vaccine for diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTP/DTaP), one for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR), four for *haemophilus influenza* type b (Hib disease), three for polio (IPV or OPV), three for hepatitis B (HBV), one dose of varicella for chickenpox, and four doses of pneumococcal conjugate (PCV), and one dose of influenza vaccine.
- The population-based study conducted in Georgia in 2003 showed that most childhood immunizations (75%) were administered in the private sector, while county health departments immunized 16%, and the sources for 9% were unknown.
- All children entering school or daycare must be age-appropriately immunized with all the required vaccines. This includes protection against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (if under 7 years of age), polio, measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis B, *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib disease) (if under 5 years of age), and varicella (chickenpox).
- In addition, children who are entering 6<sup>th</sup> grade are required to show 1) proof of protection against measles (two doses given on or after the first birthday and at least four weeks apart or a positive serology) and 2) proof of protection against varicella or chickenpox (vaccination dates, positive serology, or a health care provider's interpretation of a parent's description of disease history).
- People of all ages should have their immunization status reviewed on each visit to their health care provider and any vaccines that are currently routinely recommended should be administered if indicated.

### The Resources

- The Georgia Vaccines for Children Program (VFC), which began in October 1994, is coordinated by the Georgia Immunization Program. The Georgia VFC Program

provides free vaccines to private and public providers for children birth through 18 years of age who are Medicaid-enrolled, American Indian/Alaska Native, uninsured, and underinsured (children whose vaccinations are not covered by insurance). As of December 2003, 247 public health clinics in Georgia and over 2,140 private physicians at 1,008 locations participate.

- During 2003, public health clinics in Georgia's 159 counties administered 851,803 doses of vaccine and other providers (including hospitals and private physicians) administered 1,266,928 doses of vaccine supplied by the VFC Program.
- Public Health's budget for vaccines included \$8.4 million in legislatively appropriated state funds in fiscal year 2003 and another \$28 million in federal immunization grant funds for calendar year 2003.
- Fees charged for immunizations vary, depending on ability to pay. For children who qualify for the VFC Program, private providers may charge an administration fee of up to \$14.81 per injection. Medicaid and PeachCare reimburse providers for vaccinations given to Medicaid and PeachCare recipients.
- To overcome barriers to vaccination, Georgia's public health departments remind parents when their children's vaccinations are due; offer extended clinic hours; give vaccinations on a walk-in basis; and distribute educational materials on immunization.
- The Georgia Registry of Immunization Transactions and Services (GRITS) was introduced in May 2003. Among other benefits, the registry allows enrolled providers, both public and private, to input and access a child's complete immunization record. This will help to improve the health of Georgia's children, decrease over- and under-immunization, and give a better overall picture of the immunization status of all of Georgians. The benefits are beginning to be realized as the registry is used in population-based recalls for children who are behind schedule in receiving their shots.
- As of September 2004, the registry team had created partnerships with over 750 public health and private providers of vaccines. With the help of these partners, the registry has over 22 million immunization transactions and 2.4 million clients being managed in the database. As of July 2004, the registry was expanded to include all ages from birth to death.
- Adults need to be protected against vaccine preventable diseases too. Depending upon a person's immunization history, age and risk factors, vaccinations against diseases such as tetanus, diphtheria, influenza and pneumococcal pneumonia may be needed. Both influenza and pneumococcal vaccine costs can be reimbursed by Medicare Part B. The best way for a person to insure that he is adequately protected is to consult with his health care provider and review his immunization record at least once a year.

- More information on the Georgia Immunization Program may be obtained from the program's web site: <http://www.health.state.ga.us/programs/immunization/>.

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